

Locating Early Modern Orientalism: Epistemology, Empire, and European Consciousness

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Orientalism as conceived by Edward Said has had a lasting influence and it has produced notions that scholars from humanities are still working to nuance and clarify. *The Dialectics of Orientalism in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Marcus Keller and Javier Irigoyen-García, a contribution to a subfield that is still understudied, challenges the view that Orientalism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was similar to that of the two centuries that followed. Constructing their approach on the Hegelian theory of thesis – antithesis – synthesis, the authors highlight the fundamental differences that were in place in the engagements of the humanists of the period with the Oriental Other. The authors cover vast geographical areas and frontiers as well as topics such as empire building, epistemology of the Orient, and the formation of an imaginary Europe.

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Orientalism as conceived by Edward Said has had a lasting influence and it has produced notions that scholars from humanities are still working to nuance and clarify. *The Dialectics of Orientalism in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Marcus Keller and Javier Irigoyen-García, a contribution to a subfield that is still understudied, challenges the view that Orientalism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was similar to that of the two centuries that followed. Constructing their approach on the Hegelian theory of thesis – antithesis – synthesis, the authors highlight the fundamental differences that were in place in the engagements of the humanists of the period with the Oriental Other. The authors cover vast geographical areas and frontiers as well as topics such as empire building, epistemology of the Orient, and the formation of an imaginary Europe.

In their edited volume, *The Dialectics of Early Modern Orientalism*, literary scholars Marcus Keller and Javier Irigoyen-García collaborate with a group of literary and humanities professors and scholars to investigate the rise of Orientalist studies in early modern history. To do so, they focus on different cases to understand the relations and the making of a Western image regarding the Orient. By bringing together different studies covering the period from 1529 to 1683, the years of the first and second Ottoman sieges of Vienna, the authors have opted to engage with Edward Said's work *Orientalism* while acknowledging that early modernists "first ignored, and then treated with scant, often disapproving attention" Said's seminal approach (p. 1). In their introduction, while presenting the most important scholarship on early modern Orientalism, the editors painstakingly claim that this era needs a more nuanced and differentiated treatment (p. 3). The Orientalism of early modern history exists, they contend, but it is different from other conceptualizations of Orientalism.

With the aim of offering this conceptualization of early modern Orientalism to an era where European supremacy and colonialism were decades away from being formulated, this volume strives to present it as a “style of thought” (p. 6). As its basis, they use Hegel’s theory of a dichotomy of thesis-antithesis that has evolved into the development of a synthesis, such as the nature of knowledge or the idea of Europe. Therefore, *The Dialectics* differs from the one Said relied on originally, as it is not Foucauldian, in the sense of discourse and power/knowledge relation. Although these Saidian notions are still present, the volume instead presents a critique of Said’s Orientalism, claiming that, differently from allegorization of the Other, dialectics “expresses a practice that is more complex” than reading representations of the East in terms of allegory (p. 6).

Engaging with the relations between scholarship on the Orient and Orientalism, Part I of the volume, “Orientalist Epistemologies,” shows that ideological interests have influenced the creation of knowledge about the Orient in the early modern period. In Part II, “Empire and its Orient,” the synthesis, according to the Hegelian approach, is clearly empire building and the discursive concerns that accompanied it. The third part of the volume, “Orientalism and the Idea of Europe”, offers a perspective on the early intertwining of emerging national and European identities. Epistemology, empire building, and European consciousness underlie the chapters of part IV, entitled “Visual Dialectics,” but the authors of the contributions are more concerned with visual expressions.

The first chapter, by Oumelbanine Zhiri, focuses on the travel of Moroccan Sultan Zaydân’s library, seized by the Spanish Armada. Analyzing two works from Francisco de Gurmendi that drew on the works of the library, Zhiri rejects claims regarding Spanish refusal to interact with Arabic language and culture, and claims that the case exposes the role that this single library had in the production of knowledge or epistemology on the Orient. The Mediterranean was definitely a contact zone in early modern history, and Kaya Şahin’s contribution deals with its eastern side. Engaging with Busbecq’s *Turkish Letters*, Şahin places this work in a larger context of rivalries and conflicts that cover religious and power concerns. He claims that the Letters are a clear artifact of the tendency to build a new dialogue, not just to rely on past tropes. Notwithstanding the presence of violent, racial and vertical fantasies in early modern Orientalism, Şahin contends that the epistemological approach to the Orient of the humanists of the period is a sign that Said’s reading is insufficient to explain West-East formation in this timeframe.

Discussing the travelogue of Adam Olearius, a depiction of a diplomatic trading expedition from Germany to Persia through Russia, Aigi Heero and M. Saagpakk highlight in their chapter that through three different voices emerging in *Orientalische Reise* – the scholar, the poet, and the merchant – the Oriental Other is represented from different lights. Using Lotman’s concepts of semiotic space,

the authors conclude that, instead of the vertical conceptualization of the Other in Saidian terms, Olearius's account shows a horizontal communication of semiospheres that shifts the meaning of signs (p. 54). In their contribution, José L. Gasch-Tomás and Natalia Maillard-Álvarez compare the discourses regarding Chinese and Muslim worlds in New Spain and Castille by analyzing two specific texts. They conclude that while the Chinese were constructed as "idolaters" who could be "saved" with means other than military, the Muslims, on the contrary, were considered according to the narrative of the Spanish Reconquista and had to be tackled militarily (pp. 77-78). The early modern idea of empire that intrinsically linked politics with religion highly informed the Orientalist discourse of the period, claim the authors.

The Spanish Empire and its complicated history with its Oriental Other/Self rightly has a prominent place in the book. To develop his argument, Natalio Ohanna in his chapter about Spanish humanism on the Ottomans juxtaposes the approach revolving around the ideals of crusades and the secular rhetoric of transforming the Turks into new barbarians (p. 110) to one that places a more humanist emphasis on the Muslim by citing a common humanity. Ohanna claims that the two voices suggest tensions that were crucial in negotiating the Spanish Islamic heritage with the identity of the nation. In his contribution, David C. Moberly deals with the genre of Irene stories built on the legend that Mehmed II beheaded his favorite, a Greek concubine. Moberly highlights how this one single narrative has traveled across all European space, as well as how it was represented in a variety of ways and discourses, thus undoing a pre-conceived notion of a Europe-Orient dichotomy.

What's clear throughout the book is that the authors seem to be overly focused on dismantling Edward Said's notions as far as early modern history is concerned. However, most of the contributors end up concluding that Said's reading is still there, although the realities of Orientalism of the era cannot be explained with that single framework. What would have given the volume a greater impact, in my opinion, is a focus on the realities coming from the Ottoman frontier of South Eastern Europe or in contact zones such as Mediterranean ports or the European population of Istanbul.

Adding to a vast array of scholarly critiques to Said's Orientalism and drawing on Hegel's dialectics, Lotman's semiotics, and Mediterranean Studies, this edited volume is a valid contribution and insight into how the early modern humanists of European geography have conceptualized the Oriental and what devices and approaches they have exploited to understand the Other. Similarly important, this volume sheds light onto how the humanists of the period have negotiated scholarly, aesthetic, political, and religious concerns in their works.

German Abstract:

Lokalisierung des frühneuzeitlichen Orientalismus: Epistemologie, Imperium und europäisches Bewusstsein

Das von Edward Said entworfene Konzept des Orientalismus hatte einen bleibenden Einfluss in den Geisteswissenschaften, so wird an der Nuancierung und Klärung einzelner Ideen immer noch gearbeitet. Der von Marcus Keller und Javier Irigoyen-García herausgegebene Sammelband *The Dialectics of Orientalism in Early Modern Europe*, ein Beitrag eines bisher unterrepräsentierten Teilgebietes, stellt die Ansicht in Frage, dass der Orientalismus des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts dem der nächsten zwei Jahrhunderte ähnelt. Die Autoren basieren ihren Ansatz auf der Hegelschen Theorie der ‚These - Antithese - Synthese‘ und weisen auf die grundlegenden Unterschiede hin, die in den Auseinandersetzungen der Humanisten der damaligen Zeit mit dem orientalischen Anderen vorhanden waren. Der Band deckt weite geographische Gebiete ab und behandelt Themen wie den Aufbau von Imperien, die Erkenntnistheorie des Orients und die Bildung eines imaginären Europas.

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